STANDARDS AND METHODS CONTROL (SMC) STYLE GUIDE

DOCUMENT IDENTIFIER: A-MN-ELSM001-05-0 Rev A, 07-Apr-1989

ABSTRACT: This guide provides SMC personnel with style conventions to help ensure the consistency and quality of technical documentation. This guide is intended to be used as a primary reference before consulting other style guides.

APPLICABILITY: These guidelines apply to all SMC personnel creating or editing technical documentation.

STATUS: APPROVED 07-Apr-1989; type $VTX SMC for expiration date.

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Preface

In creating this guide, we have drawn upon the following resources: *The Chicago Manual of Style*, *Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary*, *The Software Publications Style Guide*, *The Educational Services Development and Publishing (ESDP) Style Guide*, and *The 32V Style Guide*.

The purpose of this style guide is to provide SMC personnel with style conventions to help ensure the consistency and quality of technical documentation. The guide is intended to be used as a primary reference before consulting other style guides.

For more specific guidelines on creating EL-class documents, refer to *SMC Procedures for Writers*.

For further information, the following resources are recommended: *DEC STD 015-0 Abbreviations and Units of Measurement*, *The Elements of Style*, *The Chicago Manual of Style*, and *Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary*.

Phil Kelley
Lee Mirkovic
Sheri Smaller
Pat Winner

Writing Style Considerations

This chapter presents some general writing style considerations for technical documentation.

1 Writing Style Considerations

- Avoid using a conversational style in your documentation. Do not use words such as *actually*, *basically*, *easy*, *simply*, and *just*. Although they often achieve a user-friendly tone, these words indicate a subjective judgment and are often meaningless.
- Do not use human attributes to discuss software and hardware. For example, avoid using verbs such as *think* and *assume* to describe functions of the software.
- Do not overuse adjectives. A string of adjectives is difficult to follow and a problem for translators. The following sentence becomes clearer (and eliminates the hyphenation problem) by using a wider variety of parts of speech.

  Original

  Four data-type-dependent constants partition the range of the function.

  Preferred

  Four constants partition the range of the function; these constants depend on the data type.
- Use the present tense of verbs .
- Use the active voice wherever possible.
- Use simple declarative sentences.

- Use the imperative mood when giving directions. For example:

  ```
  Follow the steps outlined in subhead 5.1.

  Enter your user name and password.
  ```

- Ensure verbs and subjects agree in person and number.
- Ensure pronoun references are unambiguous.
- Do not use masculine and feminine pronouns. If grammatically correct, use a plural form to avoid the problem.
- Use third-person verb conjugations.
- Avoid unnecessary or indefinite modifiers. For example, the following modifiers may be omitted without loss of meaning.

  ```
  actively          particular
  actual            quite
  appropriate       rather
  associated        several
  existing          simply
  fairly            suitable
  much              very
  ```

- Avoid words and phrases that add nothing to the meaning of a sentence. For example, the following italicized words are redundant.

  absolutely essential
  few *in number*
  adequate *enough*
  advance planning
  fuse *together*

  The following list illustrates complex constructions that can be shortened.

COMPLEX	SIMPLE
a large proportion of	many
all of the	all
are designed to be	are
by means of	by
despite the fact that	although
for the most part	mainly
in conjunction with	with
involve the use of	use
prior to	before
in order to	to
whether or not	whether

- The following terms are used with the specific document type.

DOCUMENT TYPE	USE	DO NOT USE
Policies and Requirements	shall, must	will, would should, ought
Optional Guidelines	should, may	must, will, can would, ought, shall

  Refer to heading 19 for more information regarding commonly misused words.

- When referring to countries other than the United States, use *non-U.S.*, rather than *foreign*.

General Usage

This chapter presents guidelines for general grammatical usage.

2 Abbreviations of Proper Nouns

Follow these guidelines when using abbreviations of proper nouns.

- The first time an abbreviation is used in a heading and/or the text, spell out the noun and follow it with the abbreviation in parentheses.
- In subsequent occurrences, use either the spelled-out noun or the abbreviation, but be consistent throughout the document.
- Abbreviations are acceptable in tables, examples, figures, and footnotes.
- Do not begin a sentence with an abbreviation.

3 Acronyms

Follow these guidelines when using acronyms.

- The first time an acronym is used in a heading and/or the text, spell out the words and follow them with the acronym in parentheses.
- In subsequent occurrences, use either the spelled-out words or the acronym, but be consistent throughout the document.
- Acronyms may be used to begin sentences.
- Form plurals of acronyms by adding *s*.

4 Appendices

Data, tables, figures, examples, or processes that are not directly related to the text of the document or that are referred to from more than one part, section, or chapter of the document are placed in appendices.

Multiple appendices are each assigned an identifying letter prefix beginning with *A*, but the pagination continues sequentially through the document.

Figure, table, heading, and subhead numbers are prefixed by the appendix letter as shown in the following example.

```
Figure A-1.  Title of Illustration

Table A-1.  Title of Table

A-1.2  Title of Heading or Subhead
```

5 Capitalization

Refer to *Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary* [1] for correct capitalization of words and phrases.

5.1 Initial Capital Letters

Use initial capital letters in the following situations.

- Each word in a title, except articles, coordinating conjunctions, and prepositions of three or fewer letters. For example:

  ```
  Single-Call Subroutine
  Search-and-Replace
  ```

- Text cross references by title.

  When referring to the title of a document, chapter, or appendix, follow the guidelines for capitalizing titles.

- Text cross references by number.

  When referring to a chapter, appendix, figure, example, or table number, use an initial capital letter for the document part. Exceptions are references to a heading, subhead, page, step, item, line, or column, even when followed by a number. For example:

  ```
  Refer to Chapter 2, subhead 3.1.
  See Table 4-2, column 3.
  Refer to Appendix A.
  Refer to page 5.
  Refer to heading 7.
  ```

- The first word of each item in a vertical list.

[1] *Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary*, Copyright © 1987, Merriam-Webster Inc.

5.2 All Lowercase Letters

Use all lowercase letters in the following situations.

- Generic names of common equipment without model number, type number, or other specific identification. For example:

```
the terminal
the assembler
the computer
```

- Generic titles. For example:

```
system manager
server administrator
user
operator
```

- Generic names of switches or controls. For example:

```
the breakpoint switch
```

- Variable elements of a program statement or command. For example:

```
the argument
the variable
the command line
```

5.3 All Uppercase Letters

Use all uppercase letters in the following situations.

- Logical operations (Boolean expressions). For example:

```
AND
OR
NOT
```

- Abbreviations of proper nouns, mnemonics, and acronyms. For example:

```
OEM
LOGIN
ASCII
```

- Designations of keys, literal elements of program statements, and commands. For example:

```
RETURN
OPEN
READ
```

- Abbreviations, when used in a title, even if they are normally in lowercase letters. For example:

```
Figure 3–2 illustrates a dc regulator.

Figure 3–2. DC Regulator
```

6 Commands and Key Designations

Follow these guidelines when using commands or key designations in text.

- Use commands or key designations only as nouns or adjectives. For example:

```
When you log out, the lights go off.

Use the DELETE command to remove the files.

Press RETURN.
```

  Do not use command names as verbs.

- Do not put quotation marks around items already designated as commands.

  Use

```
Enter the command PRINT.
```

  Do not use

```
Enter the command "PRINT."
```

- Procedures often contain key designators. Examples of such procedures must represent key designators surrounded by angle brackets to differentiate them from what is actually typed on the monitor. For example:

  Type

```
execute MAM <RETURN>

PCA <RETURN>
```

- Refer to the *Software Publications Style Guide* [2] for more information.

7 Compounds

Use the guidelines under the following subheads when forming compounds.

7.1 Hyphenated Compounds

Hyphenate the following compounds.

- A fraction written as a word. For example:

```
three-fourths
one and one-half
one-third
```

- An adverb and adverb-participle compound. For example:

```
lower-priced machine
well-known language
best-selling system
```

[2] *Software Publications Style Guide*, Copyright © 1980, Digital Equipment Corporation, order number AA-J523A-RK

- A noun followed by a participle. For example:

```
an industry-leading computer
```

- A noun consisting of a verb and an adverb. For example:

```
roll-up
log-in
dial-up
```

Note: Refer to *Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary*[3] for exceptions to this rule, such as *set up*.

- A whole number followed by a unit of measurement preceding the noun it modifies. For example:

```
a 1- to 6-character file name
an 8- by 10-inch box
```

- An adjectival phrase preceding the noun it modifies. For example:

```
State-of-the-art design is a major objective in the plan.
```

- An adjectival compound preceding or following the noun it modifies if the compound begins with any of the combining forms in the following list.

```
quasi-      quasi-official document
all-        all-inclusive code
cross-      The listing is cross-referenced.
self-       The program is self-indexing.
```

7.2 Open Compounds

Do not hyphenate the following compounds .

- An adverb ending in *ly* followed by a participle or adjective. For example:

```
a frequently used utility
a highly complex program
```

- An adverb-and-adjective compound in which the adverb cannot be misread as a simple adjective modifying the noun. For example:

```
most significant bit
less frequently used utility
```

- An adjective and noun used as an adjective if both parts have all uppercase letters. For example:

```
the ANSI COBOL standard
```

- Compound verbs. For example:

```
roll up
log in
dial up
set up
```

[3] Op Cit

8 Contractions

Do not use contractions.

9 Cross-References

Follow these guidelines when cross-referencing.

- When pointing to information in text, use the terms *previous* and *following* or *earlier* and *later*. Do not use *above* and *below*.

10 Examples in Text

Do not break a sentence with an example and then complete the sentence after the example.

Use

```
If you enter the following command, the editor creates a journal file.
$ EDIT/JOURNAL MYFILE.GNC
```

Do not use

```
If you enter
$ EDIT/JOURNAL MYFILE.GNC
the editor creates a journal file.
```

11 Figures

Follow these guidelines when creating figures.

- Call out or introduce every figure in text; the reference should occur before the figure appears.
- Make figure titles and captions short and descriptive.
- Do not start figure titles and captions with articles.
- Do not end figure titles or captions with punctuation.
- Use initial capital letters for text within figures.
- Use a period after a figure number.
- Use the guidelines for capitalizing titles and headings to capitalize figure titles and captions. Refer to subhead 5.1.
- Figures in multisection documents are assigned figure numbers with the section number prefix. Refer to subhead 32.2 for more information.
- Multipage figures repeat the figure number and title on each page, followed by the word *continued* in parenthesis.

12 Footnotes

Avoid using footnotes, if possible. However, follow these guidelines when using footnotes.

- Use footnotes to present information that supports, but is not essential to, the main discussion.
- Use abbreviations in footnotes, if possible.
- Use a superscript number to refer to a footnote in text. Place the number after the key word in the text and use the same number before the footnote itself.
- When using trademarks, refer to *Trademark Handbook for Digital Employees: Guidelines for Using Trademarks* [4] for footnoting conventions.

The production method determines the method used for signaling footnotes in a table (number or reference mark).

Refer to the *The Chicago Manual of Style* [5] for more information regarding footnoting conventions.

13 Glossaries

Refer to the *The Chicago Manual of Style* [6] for information on glossaries.

14 Heading Levels

Follow these guidelines when creating heading levels.

- Whenever possible, avoid more than four levels of headings. Using more than four levels is awkward both in text and in the table of contents.
- Use more than one subhead for each heading. It is not logical to break a topic down into only one subtopic. For example, if level 2.1 is followed by 2.1.1 and 2.2, it would be best to incorporate the material in 2.1.1 into 2.1 and eliminate the lower level.
- Separate one heading level from the next heading level with text. Avoid the following situation.

```
5.1 Preliminary Considerations

5.1.1 Data to Be Used

The program uses EMPLOYEE and DIVISION records...
```

  Instead, insert text under subhead 5.1 that discusses what the section is about.

[4] A-MN-EL00490-00-0, *Trademark Handbook for Digital Employees: Guidelines for Using Trademarks*

[5] *The Chicago Manual of Style*, Copyright © 1982, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago

[6] Ibid.

15 Indexing

Refer to the *The Chicago Manual of Style* [7] for information on indexing and indices.

16 Keyboard References

Follow these guidelines when referring to keys on the keyboard.

- Always use the verb *press* when referring to keys. Do not use the verbs *strike*, *punch*, *depress*, or *hit*. Use *enter* for commands and *type* for text. Use *enter* for combinations of entering text and pressing keys.
- Use all uppercase letters for the name of a key if the key is named on the keyboard, for example: CTRL, RETURN, SET-UP, DELETE. This guideline includes keyboards that use initial capital letters.
- Use all uppercase letters when referring to the GOLD key.
- Use lowercase letters when the key being referred to is *not* labeled on the keyboard. For example:

```
space bar
comma key
up arrow key
slash key
```

- Use the names of keys as adjectives. For example, refer to the RETURN key, rather than to RETURN. However, if the correct use of the key has been established and it is used several times within one paragraph, use *Press* RETURN.
- When referring to the numeric keypad, use the following convention.

```
Press keypad 7.
```

- When the reader is to press keys simultaneously, use a slash between the key names. For example, CTRL/C indicates that the reader should hold down the CTRL key, while pressing the C key.

  Use *x* to refer to a generic letter; use *n* to refer to a generic number.
- When the reader is to use a key sequence, use a hyphen between the key names. For example, PF1-X indicates that the reader should press first the PF1 key and then the X key.
- Boxed key symbols may be used in text (CTRL/C) or examples.

[7] Ibid.

17 Latin Expressions

Do not use Latin expressions; instead, substitute one of the corresponding English translations.

Latin	English
etc.	and so forth, and so on
e.g.	for example
i.e.	that is
via	by means of, through
et al.	and others

Exception: Vice versa is a commonly used Latin term and is acceptable in documentation unless it will be translated.

18 Lists and Sublists

Lists add clarity and emphasis to information and improve the readability and visual impact of a document. Always consider using a vertical list, rather than a list embedded in a paragraph.

Follow these guidelines when constructing lists.

- Use parallel verb tenses and parallel grammatical constructions for all elements.
- Use an initial capital letter for the first word of each item in a vertical list.
- Begin each element with the same part of speech.
- Use the same voice and punctuation for each element.
- Use numbered lists for elements that list a series of consecutive steps or for elements that refer to numbered items in text.
- When the introduction to the list mentions the number of items in the list, number each item in the list.
- Use consecutive, lowercase letters for prioritized lists or long, non-prioritized lists.
- Avoid using more than one list designated by the same characters under the same heading or subhead.
- Use bullets first and hyphens second for nested, short, non-prioritized lists.
- Avoid using third-level lists.
- Avoid using lists containing only one item.

- For nested, prioritized lists containing more than one level of steps, use numbers and then letters. For example:

```
1.
2.
3.
    a.
    b.
    c.
```

- For nested, prioritized lists containing more than one level of items, use letters and then numbers. For example:

```
a.
b.
c.
    1.
    2.
    3.
```

- When introducing information with a list, arrange the items in the same order they are discussed in text.

18.1 Introducing Lists

A list may be introduced with either a colon or a period. Follow these guidelines when introducing a list.

- When introducing a list with a complete sentence, punctuate the sentence with a period. For example:

```
The computer consists of three main parts.

1.  Monitor
2.  Hard disk
3.  Keyboard
```

- When introducing a list with an incomplete sentence, punctuate the incomplete sentence with a colon. For example:

```
Parts include:

Monitor
Hard disk
Keyboard
```

18.2 Punctuating List Elements

Follow these guidelines when punctuating list elements.

- Do not use periods at the end of list elements if each element is a phrase or word. For example:

```
The system consists of the following parts.

Memory management option
Disk and controller
Double-density diskette and controller
```

- Place a period after each of the list elements if one of the elements contains one or more complete sentences. For example:

```
Each of the examples does the following.

Declares the parameters and the global symbol names.

Checks the return status for the LIB$_INPSTRTRU. If this value is
returned, you know that more than 30 characters were entered at the
terminal and that the extra ones were removed.

Implements program.
```

- Handle combinations of phrases and sentences as follows.

```
Your system consists of two parts.

1.  The monitor

    The monitor is similar to a television screen. Everything typed on the
    keyboard appears on the monitor.

2.  The keyboard

    The keyboard is similar to a typewriter keyboard. However, in addition to
    the usual numbers and letters, it also has the other keys that can be used
    to tell the system what to do.
```

  In this example, where the explanation of each bulleted item falls in a separate paragraph from the list item, treat the list items as you would any other series of phrases; that is, do not use periods.

19 Misused Words

This subhead provides definitions and examples of proper usage for common words that are often misused in technical writing.

Above and Below

Do not use the words *above* and *below* as pointers to information in text. Instead, use the words *previous* and *following* or *earlier* and *later*. Refer to subhead 2.5 for more information regarding cross-referencing.

Affect and Effect

Affect means to influence, change, or have an effect on.

Effect, as a verb, means to cause to happen or bring about. *Effect*, as a noun, means the result of some action. For example:

```
Even minor changes will affect the performance of the database.

Even minor changes will have an effect on the performance of the database.

To effect even minor changes on the database, you ...
```

Among and Between

Among is used to show a relationship involving more than two items.

Between is used to show a relationship involving two items. For example:

```
There was a difference of opinion among the editorial groups on how to
handle cross-references.

We were able to resolve the issue between the writer and developer.
```

And/Or Construction

Avoid using the *and/or* construction, when possible. Often writers use *and/or* when they mean to use one word or the other. For example:

Use

```
File specification or logical names, or both
```

Do not use

```
File specifications and/or logical names
```

Ensure, Insure, and Assure

Ensure means to make sure, certain, or safe.

Insure implies that insurance is being provided on or for something—that specific precautionary measures are being taken.

Assure means to guarantee. For example:

```
Distribute the draft early to ensure a careful review.

Insure the package before you mail it.

I assure you that the document will be completed on time.
```

Fewer and Less

Use *fewer* when referring to countable items. Use *less* when referring to noncountable items or when discussing something in terms of size or degree. For example:

```
You will find fewer errors in the latest version.

The three-day course is less demanding than the one-day seminar.
```

If and Whether

If introduces a clause of condition. *Whether*, used with *or* in formal usage introduces alternatives. For example:

```
If the red light is off, the system is not on line.

The system manager decides whether to use the line printer or the laser
printer.
```

May and Can

Both *may* and *can* are used to indicate possibility or probability. For example:

```
Your manual may be translated.
```

In other cases, *may* implies permission, whereas *can* implies ability. For example:

```
You can run the program by pressing the RETURN key.

You may turn the system off after you log out.
```

That and Which

Use *that* for a restrictive clause and *which* for a nonrestrictive clause. A restrictive clause is essential to the meaning of the sentence and is not set off by commas. A nonrestrictive clause provides descriptive information and is set off by commas. For example:

```
Chapter 2 explains the considerations that affect good schema design.

Features include the schema, which specifies the logical definition of the
database.
```

20 Notes, Cautions, and Warnings

Choose the type of notice appropriate for the information provided.

- Note

  Contains information of special importance to the reader.

- Caution

  Contains information essential to avoid damage to software or hardware.

- Warning

  Contains information essential to the safety of personnel.

21 Numbers

The following subheads provide guidelines for using and punctuating numerals, decimals, and fractions.

21.1 Decimals

Follow these guidelines when using decimals.

- Write decimal numbers of less than one with a *0* preceding the decimal point. For example:

  ```
  0.25
  ```

- Emphasize exact measurement by following a whole number with a decimal point and a zero. Otherwise, omit the decimal point and the zero. For example:

  ```
  3.0 feet long
  approximately 3 feet long
  ```

- Align columns of numbers containing decimal points on the decimal point. All other columns of numbers are right-justified.

- Use the singular form of the unit of measurement when the number is less than 2.0. For example:

```
0.25 second
1.25 liter
1.99 foot
```

21.2 Fractions

Follow these guidelines when writing fractions.

- Write a fraction as a numeral when it is attached to other numerals. For example:

```
1 ½
```

- Write a fraction as a numeral when it is part of a unit of measure used as a modifier. For example:

```
½-inch margins
```

- Write a fraction as a numeral when it is in a series of numbers written as numerals. For example:

```
1, 7, 3/4, 8
```

- Use the singular form of the unit of measurement when the number is less than 2. For example:

```
1/4 second
1 1/4 liter
1 15/16 foot
```

- Hyphenate a fraction written as words. For example:

```
three-fourths
```

21.3 Numbers in Text

Use numerals in text in the following cases.

- If the number is 10 or more and does not begin a sentence.
- In a group of two or more numbers when at least one of the numbers is 10 or more. For example:

```
3 desks, 7 chairs, 15 file cabinets
```

- With units of measurement and time. For example:

```
3 bytes
24 hours
4 characters
16 weeks
```

- For a decimal, even if it is less than 10. For example:

```
5.5%
```

- To identify objects by number, including bits, bytes, and words. For example:

```
a value of 1
steps 3 and 4
bits 0 and 1
```

- For a fraction and any other number in a unit modifier. For example:

```
½-inch increment
6-character file name
```

- If the number precedes an abbreviation or symbol. For example:

```
8%
20 lb
```

21.4 Numbers as Words

Use numbers as words in the following cases.

- If the number is the first element of a sentence or heading title.
- If the number closely follows another number that is the first element of a sentence or heading. For example:

```
Ten or twenty characters disappeared from the file.
```

- If the number is less than 100 and precedes a compound modifier that contains a number expressed as a numeral. For example:

```
thirty-two 8-bit bytes
```

But

```
120 8-bit bytes
```

- Do not express the same number twice as a word followed by a numeral. For example:

```
Ten (10)
```

21.5 Plurals

Form the plural of a number written as a numeral by adding *s*. For example:

```
4s, 10s, 1920s
```

21.6 Punctuating Numbers

Follow these guidelines when punctuating numbers.

- Use the comma in a whole decimal number containing five or more digits. For example:

```
9000
10,000
```

- Use a hyphen between a number and word combined to form a unit modifier. For example:

  ```
  6-character file name
  ```

- Hyphenate a fraction written as a word. For example:

  ```
  three-fourths
  ```

- Insert one space between a number and the abbreviation or unit symbol it modifies, as a general rule. Exceptions are:

  kelvin

  binary thousand

  percent

  degrees Celsius

  degrees Fahrenheit

  degrees, minutes, and seconds of an angle

  multiples of bytes

Refer to the *Producing International Products* [8] for more information on punctuating numbers.

21.7 Ranges of Numbers

Follow these guidelines when handling numbers that span a range.

- Use the word *to* rather than *through* for inclusive ranges of numbers written as words or numerals and for numbers in a range that are part of a modifier containing a hyphen. For example:

  ```
  one to three characters
  12 to 20 characters
  a 1- to 6-character file name
  ```

- In tables and figures, use a hyphen or en dash to indicate a range of numbers. For example:

  ```
  12–20
  ```

- If there are more than two items in a series, place the abbreviation or symbol for a unit of measurement at the end of the range or series. If there are only two items, repeat the abbreviation or symbol. For example:

  ```
  1200, 1400, or 1600 MHz
  10% to 50%
  ```

[8] A-MN-ELSM498-00-0, *Producing International Products*

21.8 Radix Indicators

Follow these guidelines when using radix indicators.

- Indicate the radix of a number expressed as a numeral by subscript.
- If the radix cannot be expressed as a subscripted numeral, write the radix as a numeral enclosed in parentheses. For example:

  ```
  23(10)
  ```

- Do not use commas in octal, hexadecimal, or 4-digit decimal numbers.

22 Prefixes

Follow these guidelines when adding a prefix to a word.

- If the prefix ends in the same letter as the first letter of the root word, retain the first letter of the root word. For example:

  ```
  enter        reenter
  numeric      nonnumeric
  record       interrecord
  ride         override
  satisfied    dissatisfied
  ```

- Do not place a hyphen between the prefix and the root when using the following prefixes.

  ```
  anti      antilogarithm          multi      multiprogramming
  co        coexist                non        nonexistent, nonzero
  dis       disassemble            over       overlay
  extra     extracurricular        pre        preassembler, preset
  infra     infrared               pseudo     pseudodevice
  inter     interrecord            re         resubmit
  intra     intrastate             sub        subprogram
  macro     macrograph             super      superset
  micro     microprocessor         ultra      ultrasound
  mis       miscalculate           un         unconditional
  ```

- Hyphenate prefixed words in the following instances.
  - — If the root element is all uppercase letters, initial capital letters, or a number expressed as a figure. For example:

    ```
    non-Digital computer
    pre-200 series
    ```

  - — If the resulting word is a homograph whose meaning would otherwise be unclear. For example:

    ```
    re-cover      recover
    re-solve      resolve
    re-collect    recollect
    re-search     research
    re-store      restore
    re-create     recreate
    ```

    However, avoid these hyphenated constructions. For example, use *cover again* instead of *re-cover* or *search again* instead of *re-search*.

- If the root element is a hyphenated or compound word, the preferred solution is to rewrite the sentence without the compound term. For example:

```
non-computer-using banks        banks that do not use computers
non-file-oriented device        a device that is not file-oriented
```

23 Symbols

Follow these guidelines when using symbols.

- Symbols may be used in text, figures, and tables. Exceptions are the symbol for foot (') and the symbol for inch ("). For more information, refer to *DEC STD 015-0 Abbreviations and Units of Measurement*. [9]
- When referring to the symbol by name, write out the name of the symbol in text and enclose the symbol in parentheses. For example:

```
The dollar sign ($) prompt

Multiply the number by pi (π )
```

24 Tables

Follow these guidelines when creating tables.

- Use the guidelines for capitalizing titles and headings to capitalize table titles, columns, and rows. Refer to subhead 5.1.
- Condense the material as much as possible.
- Confine the table to a single page, if possible.
- Provide a column header for each column, unless it is a very simple table.
- Keep entries brief; use an initial capital letter only for the first word of each entry.
- Call out or introduce every table in text; the reference should occur before the table appears.
- Make table titles short and descriptive.
- Use a period after a table number.
- Tables in multisection documents are assigned table numbers with the section number prefix. Refer to subhead 32.2 for more information.
- Multipage tables repeat the table number and title on each page, followed by the word *continued* in parenthesis.

[9] A-DS-EL00015-00-0, *DEC STD 015-0 Abbreviations and Units of Measurement*

25 Trademarks

Refer to the following documents for all information regarding the use of trademarks.

- *Trademark Handbook for Digital Employees: Guidelines for Using Trademarks*[10]
- *Trademark Handbook for Digital Employees: Digital Trademarks List*[11]
- *Trademark Handbook for Digital Employees: Third-party Trademarks List* [12]

26 Where Clauses

Where clauses are commonly used to identify values or variables. This format sometimes confuses readers, especially if the word *where* is not clearly distinguished. Always use a colon with *where*. For example:

```
To turn on the static asynchronous lines for dial-up sessions, run the
Network Control Program (NCP) and enter the following commands.

$ RUN SYS$SYSTEM: NCP
NCP DEFINE LINE dev-c-u STATE ON RECEIVE BUFFERS 4_LINE
SPEED baud rate
NCP DEFINE CIRCUIT dev-c-u STATE ON
NCP EXIT

where:

baud rate is the speed at which the line will send and receive data

dev is the first two letters of the device name
```

27 Units of Measure

Units of measure are expressed in metric and equivalent U.S. customary units. Refer to *DEC STD 015-0 Abbreviations and Units of Measurement*[13] for more information. Region-specific documents may be exempt from this guideline.

When both U.S. units and equivalent metric units are required, express the metric unit first, followed by the equivalent U.S. unit in parenthesis. For example:

```
25 degrees Celsius (77 degrees Fahrenheit)
```

[10] Op Cit, A-MN-EL00490-00-0

[11] A-MN-EL00490-01-0, *Trademark Handbook for Digital Employees: Digital Trademarks List*

[12] A-MN-EL00490-02-0, *Trademark Handbook for Digital Employees: Third-party Trademarks List*

[13] Op Cit, A-DS-EL00015-00-0

Punctuation

This chapter presents punctuation guidelines.

28 Apostrophes

Follow these guidelines when using apostrophes.

- Use apostrophes to form possessives. For example:

```
many users' responses
one system manager's options
```

- Use apostrophes to form plurals of lowercase single letters. For example:

```
a's  s's  c's  y's
```

- Do not use apostrophes to form plurals of numbers. For example:

```
4s  10s  1920s
```

- Do not use apostrophes to form plurals of abbreviations or acronyms. For example:

```
PCs  OEMs  I/Os
```

29 Brackets

Avoid nested parenthetical remarks in text. When parenthetical remarks cannot be avoided, use parenthesis for the inner remark and brackets for the outer remark.

30 Colons

A colon directs the reader's attention to whatever follows it: a list, a definition, an instruction, or important additional information.

Do not use a colon after a lead-in to a table or figure. The table or figure might float in the final text and the colon would thus lead to nothing. Use a period instead. For example:

```
Figure 3-4 is a Bachman diagram for the PARTS database.
```

Refer to subhead 18.1 for guidelines on using colons with lists.

31 Commas

A comma marks a pause or a separation of ideas or elements in a sentence. This subhead provides guidelines for the correct use of commas in various sentence structures.

31.1 Commas in Compound Sentences

A compound sentence contains two or more independent clauses joined by a coordinating conjunction or a comma and a coordinating conjunction. Place a comma before the coordinating conjunction unless the clauses are short and closely related. For example:

```
The system prints an error message, but you can continue processing the
file.

Close the file and print the report.
```

31.2 Commas with Nonrestrictive and Restrictive Modifiers

Follow these guidelines when using commas with modifiers.

- Use commas to set off a nonrestrictive modifier, which provides additional information, but does not affect the meaning of the words it modifies. For example:

  ```
  Table 6-1, which begins on page 2, describes the hardware you need.
  ```

- Do not use commas to separate a restrictive clause, which affects meaning, from the word it modifies. For example:

  ```
  Table 6-1 describes the hardware that you need to complete your system.
  ```

- Use a comma to set off contrasting and opposing expressions within sentences. For example:

  ```
  He changed the software, not the hardware.
  ```

31.3 Commas with Introductory Clauses

Place a comma after an introductory clause or a long introductory phrase. For example:

```
For example, code that is complex is often difficult to maintain.

The more complex code is, the more difficult it is to maintain.
```

31.4 Commas in Transitional Phrases with Conjunctive Adverbs

Transitional phrases such as *for example* and *in fact* usually read better if set off with commas.

Set off conjunctive adverbs such as *however* and *therefore* with commas. For example:

```
Complex code, however, is difficult to maintain.
```

31.5 Commas in a Series

Follow these guidelines when using commas in a series.

- In a series of three or more short elements, separate the elements with commas. If the last two elements are joined by a conjunction, place a comma before the conjunction. For example:

  ```
  The code is obscure, complex, and difficult to maintain.
  ```

- In a series of three or more elements connected by both *and* and *or*, place commas carefully to express exact meaning. For example:

  ```
  Code that is complex and obscure, or is just difficult to maintain,
  frustrates the meticulous software engineer.
  ```

- Separate two or more adjectives by commas if each modifies the noun alone. If the first adjective modifies the idea expressed by the combination of the second adjective and the noun, no comma should be used. For example:

  ```
  He had difficulty maintaining obscure, complex code.

  He had difficulty maintaining the complex assembly code.
  ```

31.6 Commas with Parentheses, Brackets, and Quotation Marks

If it is required by context, place the comma after a closing parenthetical remark or bracket and inside closing quotation marks, unless the quotation marks are part of a literal string. For example:

```
An error message, "Invalid User Identification Code (UIC)," appears if an
account number for the UIC includes an 8 or 9.

The symbol can have one of the following values: ABST, "ABST", or %ABST.
```

Avoid using parenthetical remarks in mid-sentence.

32 Dashes

The following subheads contain guidelines for using dashes.

32.1 Em Dashes

The em dash (–) can be used to indicate a break in thought or in the structure of a sentence.

Note: When an em dash is unavailable, two en dashes may be used to represent an em dash.

32.1.1 Em Dashes in Place of Parentheses or Commas

Use em dashes, like parentheses and commas, to set off parenthetical material in a sentence. Dashes used in this way are more informal than parentheses or commas and suggest the loose syntax of everyday speech. For example:

Use of Commas

```
The EXECUTE command, like the COMPILE command,
accepts processor switches in an alternative
form.
```

Use of Dashes

```
The EXECUTE command -- like COMPILE -- accepts
processor switches in an alternative form.
```

32.1.2 Em Dashes in Place of Colons

Em dashes may be used in place of colons to introduce an embedded list or to alert the reader that an important explanation, definition, or qualification is to follow. For example:

```
The internal date and time format is a 36-bit quantity -- one that
frequently occurs as a JSYS argument or is returned as a value.
```

32.2 En Dashes

An en dash (-) is one-half the length of an em dash. For example:

```
steps 4-6
January-June 1988
```

The principal use of an en dash is to indicate continuing, or inclusive, numbers—dates, time, or reference numbers. Do not use an en dash in text.

Use an en dash to separate a figure of table number prefix from the figure or table number. For example:

```
Table 2-1.  Title
```

```
Figure 3-2.  Title
```

33 Ellipsis

An ellipsis (...) indicates the omission of information. An ellipsis may be vertical or horizontal.

34 Parentheses

As a general rule, avoid using parenthetical expressions.

Use parentheses to set off material that interrupts the main idea or digresses from it. Parentheses enclose material that provides additional, detachable information.

35 Periods

Place a period at the end of every declarative and imperative sentence.

Refer to subhead 18.1 for guidelines on using periods with lists.

35.1 Periods with Parentheses and Brackets

The following guidelines apply to the placement of a period with parentheses or brackets.

- If parentheses or brackets enclose a sentence, place the period inside the closing parenthesis or bracket and capitalize the initial word of the parenthetical remark. For example:

```
(For details on loading a database, see the Database Design Guide.)
```

- If parentheses or brackets enclose a phrase or clause ending a sentence, place the period outside the closing parenthesis or bracket. For example:

```
These subprograms do not require the use of the terminal on the lower
portion of the module (called the event terminal).
```

- If parentheses enclose a short sentence in a longer sentence, omit the period in the parenthetical sentence.

35.2 Periods with Quotation Marks

Place the period inside the closing quotation mark at the end of a sentence, except where the quotation mark is part of a literal string. For example:

```
The rules governing the transfer of data are called "protocols."

The COBOL literal is "LOGGING OUT ON".
```

In the latter case, consider rewriting the sentence so that the programming term does not fall at the end of the sentence.

35.3 Periods with Titles and Headings

Do not use a period after the following constructions.

- Headings and subheads

- Table and figure titles, for example:

```
Table 7-2. Locking Conflicts with Concurrent Run Units

Figure 2-5. Compilation of Database
```

Use a period after the table or figure number.

36 Quotation Marks

Refer to heading 6 and subheads 31.6, 35.2, and 37.3 for information on using quotation marks.

37 Semicolons

The following subheads contain guidelines for using semicolons.

37.1 Semicolons with Independent Clauses

Use a semicolon instead of a comma and conjunction to join closely related independent sentences or clauses. For example:

```
In keypad editing, you press keys to edit text; in no_keypad editing, you
enter commands.

To solve an editing problem, consult your editor; to solve a graphics
problem, consult your artist.
```

37.2 Semicolons in a Series

Use a semicolon as a delimiter in a sentence that contains clauses or a series of phrases that contain commas. For example:

```
The standard directory listing consists of the following columns: the file
name, including the file type; the file length expressed in blocks; and the
date of creation.
```

If the number of items embedded in a series is large, consider using a vertical list of these items rather than an embedded list.

37.3 Semicolons with Quotation Marks and Parentheses

Place the semicolon outside quotation marks or parentheses. For example:

```
When referring to keys, use the term "press"; never use "punch."

Set your default to the proper directory (DOC$TOOLS); otherwise, you will
not be able to access the file.
```

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